The Historical and Biblical look into The Ancient Near Eastern World
Objectives for the yeshiva class, Ancient Covenants:

• Understand Biblical Language in its ancient context

• Gain a better understanding of our obligations as servants of the Great King of the Universe

• Learn how to truly live in unity according to the word of YHVH in its covenant context

• Learn to submit to our creator by understanding his authority.

• Teach Hebrew Roots Communities to begin the process of living according to what covenant really means

• Develop men and woman in leadership about covenant life.

• Equip our Brothers and Sisters to understand their roles in YHVH’s Kingdom

• Finally, understand the language of Covenant used by Yeshua, the Apostles and Paul in his writings.
Subjects that we will cover in our Covenant Yeshiva:

- Types of Covenants in the Ancient World
- Biblical Language used by other Nations in the Ancient East
- Exodus 20 in Context of Ancient Covenant Form
- The Book of Deuteronomy as a Suzerain Covenant
- The Grant Covenant given to Noach, Abraham, Phinehas, and David
- The Language of the Siddur in context of Covenants of the Near East.
- Historical reasons why YHVH selected Israel (land of Canaan as the promise land)
- Differences between Covenant and Commandments
- Definitions of Words in light of Covenant Language of the Ancient East.
- How tribute was paid in the Ancient world
- Methods of Ratification of Ancient Covenant in parallel to the Scripture
What does it mean to Observe the Torah?

See Book Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament by John Walton

Comparative Exploration: What does it meant to Observe Torah?

Read Table 8 Mendenhall’s Chart Comparing Covenant and Law. Page 299-301
Ashtoreth and Baal

Did you know what they represented in the ancient world?

See Ancient Israel’s Faith and History pages 34-38

Compare with Deuteronomy 8:1-20
What are Values in the Ancient World?

Values = Worship

Ancient Israel’s Faith and History

page 62-63
The Name of YHVH from a Covenant perspective

- See Ancient Near Eastern thought and the Old testament page 92 Gray box
Why did YHVH did not want Israel to come in covenant with the nations of the land? Allegiance to other Idols

• See Ancient Near Eastern thought and the Old testament Appendix page 335 for the list for the list of the gods of ancient near eastern kingdoms.

• In the ancient world coming in covenant with a foreign nation was to submit and accept their god as supreme in your life.

Example:

Judah married the Canaanite woman

Esau Married the Canaanite and the Medianite woman

Cosbi and Zimri in the Wilderness
How is YHVH different from the gods of the Ancient Near East?

• See Page 110 Ancient Near Eastern thought and the Old testament
Definitions for our study:

Suzerain – Sovereign or King

su·ze·rain n.

1. A nation that controls another nation in international affairs but allows it domestic sovereignty.

2. A feudal lord to whom fealty was due.

Vassal – Subjects or Servants
A vassal or feudatory is a person who has entered into a mutual obligation to a lord or monarch in the context of the feudal system in medieval Europe. The obligations often included military support and mutual protection, in exchange for certain privileges, usually including the grant of land held as a fiefdom. The term can be applied to similar arrangements in other feudal societies. In contrast, a fidelity, or fidelitas, was a sworn loyalty, subject to the king.
Major types of Royal Covenants / Treaties in the Ancient Near East

1. Suzerian – Vassal Treaty

2. Royal Land Grant Covenant

3. Parity Covenants
Royal Land Grant Covenant to Noach

NOAHIC

Genesis 9:8-17

Type of Covenant

Royal Grant Made with “righteous” (6:9) Noah (and his descendants and every living thing on earth - all life that is subject to man’s jurisdiction)

DESCRIPTION

An unconditional divine promise never to destroy all earthly life with some natural catastrophe; the covenant “sign” being the rainbow in the storm cloud.
ABRAHAMIC #1

Royal Grant

Genesis 12:1-3

Participants: Made with Abram conditional that he would leave all his country, kindred, and father’s house, and follow the Lord into the land which He would show him.

DESCRIPTION

The promise was a fourfold blessing:

1) Increase into a numerous people;
2) Material and spiritual prosperity;
3) The exaltation of Abram’s name;
4) Abraham was not only to be blessed by God, but to be a blessing to others implicitly by the coming of the Messiah through his descendants.
ABRAHAMIC #1 part two

Genesis 15 Royal (land) Grant

Participants were:

Made with “righteous” Abram (v. 6) and his descendants (v.16)

DESCRIPTION

Renewal of Abrahamic Covenant with unconditional divine promise to fulfill the grant of the land; a selfmaledictory oath symbolically enacted it (v. 17)
ABRAHAMIC #2

Type of Covenant:

Genesis 17 is a Suzerain-vassal

Participants were:

Made with Abraham as patriarchal head of his household

Description of Covenant:

A conditional divine pledge to be Abraham’s God and the God of his descendants (vv. 4,9); the condition: total consecration to the Lord as symbolized by circumcision
SINAI

Exodus 19-24

Type: Suzerain-vassal

PARTICIPANTS

Made with Israel as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and as the people the Lord has redeemed from bondage to an earthly power

DESCRIPTION

A conditional divine pledge to be Israel’s God (as her protector and the Guarantor of her blessed destiny); the condition: Israel’s total consecration to the Lord as His people (His kingdom) who live by His rule and serve His purposes in history
PHINEHAS
Numbers 25:10-13

Type of Covenant:
Royal Grant

PARTICIPANTS
Made with the zealous priest Phinehas

DESCRIPTION
An unconditional divine promise to maintain the family of Phinehas in a “perpetual priesthood” (implicitly a pledge to Israel to provide for her forever with a faithful priesthood)
DAVIDIC

2 Samuel 7:4-17

Type of Covenant:

Royal Grant

PARTICIPANTS

Made with faithful King David after his devotion to God as Israel’s king and the Lord’s anointed vassal had come to special expression (v. 2)

DESCRIPTION

An unconditional divine promise to establish and maintain the Davidic dynasty on the throne of Israel (implicitly a pledge to Israel) to provide her forever with a godly king like David and through that dynasty to do for her what He had done through David - bring her into rest in the promised land (1 Kings 4:20-22; 5:3,4)
New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Type of Covenant:

Royal Grant

PARTICIPANTS

Promised to rebellious Israel as she is about to be expelled from the promised land in actualization of the most severe covenant curse (Leviticus 26:27-39; Deuteronomy 28:36,37, 45-68)

DESCRIPTION

An unconditional divine promise to unfaithful Israel to forgive her sins and establish His relationship with her on a new basis by writing His law “on their heart” - a covenant of pure grace
Major types of Royal Covenants / Treaties in the Ancient Near East

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3. Parity Covenants
SUZERAIN-VASSAL (CONDITIONAL)

A covenant regulating the relationship between a great king and one of his subject kings. The great king claimed absolute right of sovereignty, demanded total loyalty and service (the vassal must “love” his suzerain) and pledged protection of the subject’s realm and dynasty, conditional on the vassal’s faithfulness and loyalty to him. The vassal pledged absolute loyalty to his suzerain — whatever service his suzerain demanded — and exclusive reliance on the suzerain’s protection. Participants called each other “lord” and “servant” or “father” and “son.”

(cf. Joshua 9:6,8; Ezekiel 17:13-18; Hosea 12:1.)
Suzerian – Vassal Treaty

**Suzerainty** occurs where a [region](#) or [people](#) is a [tributary](#) to a more [powerful](#) entity which controls its [foreign affairs](#) while allowing the tributary [vassal state](#) some limited domestic [autonomy](#).[1] The dominant entity in the suzerainty relationship, or the more powerful entity itself, is called a [suzerain](#). The term suzerainty was originally used to describe the relationship between the [Ottoman Empire](#) and its surrounding regions. It differs from [sovereignty](#) in that the tributary has only some (often limited) self-rule. Continue-----
A suzerain can also refer to a feudal lord, to whom vassals must pay tribute. Although it is a concept which has existed in a number of historical empires, it is a concept that is very difficult to describe using 20th- or 21st-century theories of international law, in which sovereignty either exists or does not. While a sovereign nation can agree by treaty to become a protectorate of a stronger power, modern international law does not recognize any way of making this relationship compulsory on the weaker power.
Ancient Near East, specifically Israel

Suzerainty treaties and similar covenants and agreements between near-eastern nations were quite prevalent in the pre-monarchic and monarchy periods of the Ancient Israelites. The Hittites, Egyptians, and Assyrians had been suzerains to the Israelites and other surrounding nation states of the Levant during these periods (1200-600 BCE). The Ancient Israelites reflected the understanding of suzerain to their understanding of their covenant (law) with God. According to Michael Coogan, the structure of the covenant law was structured similarly to the Hittite form of suzerain.[3] Each treaty would typically begin with an "Identification" of the Suzerain Exodus 20:2, followed by a historical prologue which catalogues the relationship between the two groups Exodus 20:2, "with emphasis on the benevolent actions of the suzerain towards the vassal."
Following historical prologue comes the stipulations Exodus 20:3-20:17. This includes tributes, obligations, and other forms of subordination that will be imposed on the Israelites.[5] According to the Hittite form, after the stipulations were offered to the vassal, it was necessary to include a request to have copies of the treaty that would be read throughout the kingdom periodically. This section is missing from the initial issuing of the Ten Commandments. What followed that was an addition of authority and further security of the treaty being carried out.[6] The treaty would have divine and earthly witnesses purporting the treaty's validity, trustworthiness, and efficacy. This also tied into the blessings that would come from following the treaty and the curses from breaching it. This section is also missing from the initial issuing of the Ten Commandments. For disobedience, curses would be given to those who had not remained steadfast in carrying out the stipulations of the treaty. Coogan offers two verses for the curses and blessings, Exodus 20:5-6Exodus 20:12[7] Wikipedia free encyclopedia
ROYAL GRANT (UNCONDITIONAL)

A king’s grant (of land or some other benefit) to a loyal servant for faithful or exceptional service. The grant was normally perpetual and unconditional, but the servant’s heirs benefited from it only as they continued their father’s loyalty and service (cf. 1 Samuel 8:14; 22:7; 27:6; Esther 8:1.)
And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.
Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds;

That all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that sheweth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or sheweth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day? {sheweth...: Heb. uncovereth mine ear}
Esther 8:

1 ¶ On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her.

2 And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.
PARITY COVENANT

A covenant between equals, binding them to mutual friendship or at least to mutual respect for each other’s spheres and interests. Participants called each other “brothers.”

(Genesis 21:27; 26:31; 31:44-54; 1 Kings 5:12; 15:19; 20:32-34; Amos 1:9.)
Commitments made in these covenant were accompanied by self-maledictory oaths (made orally, ceremonially or both).

The gods were called upon to witness the covenants and implement the curses of the oaths if the covenants were violated.

Information in the above chart is adapted in part from the NASB Study Bible (Zondervan Publishing House).
Brief Summary of Suzerain Treaties:

In the Ancient Near East, treaties between kings was common. These were treaties drawn up among equals and mostly outlined agreements to honor each other's boundaries, to maintain trade relations, and return run-away slaves. These treaties are preserved in the Mari Tablets and in the Amarna texts. Also preserved in these collections are treaties drafted between a superior and his inferior. If the relationship was familial or friendly, the parties are referred to as "father" and "son." If the relationship is bereft of kindness and intimacy, the parties are referred to as "lord" and "servant," or "king" and "vassal," or "greater king" and "lesser king."
The greater king is the suzerain and the lesser king is a prince, or a lesser lord in the service of the greater king. The lesser lord is a representative of all the common people who are under the protection of the greater king. He enforces the treaty among the masses.
Below is a form of a Hittite Suzerainty Treaty.

Hittite suzerainty treaty form

1. **Preamble**: Identifies the parties involved in the treaty
2. **Prologue**: Lists the deeds already performed by the Suzerain on behalf of the vassal
3. **Stipulations**: Terms to be upheld by the vassal for the life of the treaty
4. **Provision for annual public reading**: A copy of the treaty was to be read aloud annually in the vassal state for the purpose of renewal
5. **Divine witness to the treaty**: These usually include the deities of both the Suzerain and the vassal
6. **Blessings if the stipulations of the treaty are upheld and curses if the stipulations are not upheld**
7. **Sacrificial Meal**: Both parties would share a meal to show their participation in the treaty
These Suzerain/Vassal treaties open with two sections:

1) The identification of the Suzerain by his name and titles;
2) The historical survey of the Suzerain's dealings with the vassal. The purpose is to illustrate to the vassal how much the Suzerain has done to protect and establish the vassal who therefore owes submission and allegiance to the Suzerain. These two sections are referred to as the "Preamble."
3. Stipulations —

What the vassal is required to do is spelled out in principal and detail. This section is often concluded with the requirement that the vassal deposit his copy of the treaty in his temple, where he is to occasionally read and study it to refresh his memory concerning his duties.

4. The Blessings and Curses of the Suzerain —

If the stipulations are met by the vassal, he will receive the Suzerain's blessings, which are listed. If the vassal fails to meet the stipulations, he will receive the Suzerain's curses, which are also listed.
PROTECTING THE COVENANT DOCUMENT-

The Suzerain would keep one copy of the treaty and the vassal would keep one copy of the treaty. A number of ratifying ceremonies were used depending upon the era and culture. But the most widely used rite was that of cutting the bodies of animals in halves and placing them in two rows with enough space between for the two parties of the treaty to walk side by side. As they walked between the pieces, they were vowing to each other, "May what has happened to these animals, happen to me if I break this covenant with you."
Covenant Documents of the Bible Patterned After Suzerain Treaties:

Suzerain Covenant in Exodus 20

1. (1-2) "Yahweh" is the Suzerain who delivered this Preamble to Moses, the vassal-lord who represents the people under the authority of the Suzerain.

2. Names & Titles = "I am the YHVH, your ELOHIM."

3. Historical prologue = "Who brought you out of Egypt..."

4. Stipulations given to Israel with selected Blessings and Curses in (3-17).

5. Stipulations = the 10 commandments;

6. Blessings and Curses = (5b-6); (7b); (12b).
Legal Terms to remember

What is the difference between apodictic law and casuistic law?

- Apodictic- Commands that begin with "do" or "do not" - direct commands telling them what to do to fulfill their covenant w/ God.

- Casuistic- case by case (elements are conditional-ex of what may be the case or what may happen
Science or philosophy of law. Jurisprudence may be divided into three branches: analytical, sociological, and theoretical. The analytical branch articulates axioms, defines terms, and prescribes the methods that best enable one to view the legal order as an internally consistent, logical system. The sociological branch examines the actual effects of the law within society and the influence of social phenomena on the substantive and procedural aspects of law. The theoretical branch evaluates and criticizes law in terms of the ideals or goals postulated for it.
Literary Context of the Law in the Torah and Ancient Near East

**Torah**
- Essentially a self-revelation of Deity
- Covenant charter that synthesizes an entire detailed and organized vision on the “right” of what is meant to be holy (Exodus 19:5-6 / Deut 26:19)

**Ancient Near East**
- Essentially a self-glorification of the King
- Political Charter that synthesizes an entire detailed and organized vision of the “right” exercise of justice
Ancient Near eastern Thought and the old testament

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Torah

• Stipulations of the Covenant
• Portrays the ideal covenant keeper
• The prime purpose of the biblical compilation is sanctification

Ancient Near East

• Treatise on Jurisprudence
• Portrays the ideal king
• The prime purpose of the Mesopotamian compilations is justice
SUMMARY COMPARISON OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN LAWS AND THE TANACH

1. The main purpose of ANE law is to establish order in a kingdom. The main purpose of OT law is to establish a relationship between God and his people.

2. ANE laws are in a standard law code form. OT laws are in a treaty-covenant form.

3. ANE laws are 100% civil. OT laws are 74% worship instruction and only 17% civil.

4. ANE laws legitimize a king’s rule. OT laws teach holiness, with God as the standard.
5. ANE laws are nearly entirely casuistic (if...then[penalty]), because that’s the precedent mentality sort of format that civil judges can best relate to. They are never fully apodictic. OT laws are predominantly apodictic (you must/you must not, no penalty usually specified) because the ultimate Judge is God, humans.

6. ANE laws regulate civil behavior so that a society can be standard: safe and functional. OT laws teach holiness so that Israel can be distinct from all other nations by its holiness.

7. ANE laws don’t foreshadow anything. OT laws teach principles that will be useful in the Renewed Covenant age and predict Messiah’s work as their fulfillment.
8. ANE laws are short and paradigmatic. OT law is long and paradigmatic.

9. ANE laws are lists of laws usually sandwiched between a prologue and epilogue. OT law is surrounded by and interwoven with narratives of God's deliverance of and creation of a people for himself.

10. ANE laws establish the legitimacy of a particular king and a particular king's rule. OT laws are pre-monarchical and say little about kingship. And what they say is primarily negative, i.e., warning about the dangers of monarchy – that actions of a king could keep the people from God's blessing.

11. ANE laws are implicitly temporary. OT laws are implicitly long-term because they are stipulations of a covenant. They require a new covenant for a new formulation.
12. ANE laws are based upon the legitimacy of idolatry — a whole system thinking about life and its purposes — since the pagan idol gods are those who legitimize the lawgiver, the king. OT law focuses heavily on liberating God’s people from idolatry.

13. ANE laws want a result: an ordered kingdom obeying a king. OT laws want a result: a people saved from sin, obeying God.

14. ANE laws recognize the legitimacy of various classes of people. OT law creates one class of people, all of whom are equally under the law. In this regard, ANE laws provide for discrimination under a king’s autocracy, and OT laws provide for inclusion on equal terms in God’s family.

15. ANE laws regulate what is permissible. OT law reveals what is intrinsically morally right and wrong.

17. ANE law purports to be the indirect revelation of gods to a king and via that king’s formulation, to the people of his kingdom. Biblical law purports to be a revelation of one God to his chosen covenant people for all time.

18. The king enforces ANE law. God enforces his law directly. ("I am the Lord.")

19. In ANE laws, the prologue justifies the king. In biblical law the prologue is salvation history and gives to God’s people their assignment as a kingdom of priests.

20. In ANE laws, the king in effect promises (sometimes via an oath) to carry out justice by forcing individuals to do the things the law requires. In biblical law, God promises to make both the people as individuals and the people as a unity part of his eternal family if they show faithfulness in what the law requires.

21. ANE laws are always code and never covenant. Biblical laws are always covenant and never merely code.
Future studies on Covenants

1. Grant Treaty

2. Love in ancient Treaties

3. Speech-Forms in Hebrew Law and prophetic Oracles

4. The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets

5. Hebrew word Yada (know)

6. Psalm in covenant

7. Royal Grants & Davidic covenant

8. Significance of the Verb Love in the David-Jonathan covenant
Deuteronomy
This entire book of Moses is saturated with Suzerain Treaty language and structure. It is not properly the treaty document itself, but it is based upon such a treaty, making reference to it often.
Suzerain Covenant in the book of Deuteronomy

1. Historical Prologue language and structure; (4:32-40)
2. Stipulations; (4:44 - 5:21)
3. Blessings and Curses; (6:4-25)
4. Reflections of all the sections of a suzerain treaty; (8)
5. also Reflects all the sections of a suzerain treaty(11);
6. Reflects the relationship of a vassal king to the Suzerain; (17:14-20)
7. Reflects the language and structure of war-time arrangements between a Suzerain and his people; (20)
8. Curses and Blessings; (27-28)
9. Covenant Renewal; (29)